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THE ORIGIN OF THE TANNHÄUSER-LEGEND *

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE QUESTION

Since the appearance in 1897 and 1898 of two notable essays by Gaston Paris in the *Revue de Paris*¹ the origin and development of the Tannhäuserlegend has been the subject of frequent discussion. A legend, the German character of which has been unquestioned since the days of the Romantics and Wagner, was now claimed to be of Italian origin and to have its starting-point in a tradition connected with a mountain-peak in the central Apennine range. The distinctively German features of the story, the name of the hero and the *Venusberg*, were explained as later changes or additions introduced into the legend after it had come to Germany by way of Switzerland. The ultimate source of the legend itself was to be found in Celtic literature, whence the material came to Italy with the rest of the matter of Britain thru French mediation, tho in this case, it had to be admitted, no French version is known.

These views of Gaston Paris gave rise to a fruitful discussion. The *Venusberg* in particular was made the subject of an essay by Friedrich Kluge.² He conceded the Italian provenience for the unholy paradise, but denied it for the other features of the legend, which he regarded as of German development and to have been carried to Italy by German travellers. Erich Schmidt³ is inclined to agree with Kluge and upholds the identification of the legendary Tannhäuser with the historical Minnesinger of that name. Reuschel⁴ suggests that

* Victor Junk's book, entitled *Tannhäuser in Saga und Dichtung* (Munich 1912), was not available when this article was sent to press.

¹ *Le Paradis de la Reine Sibylle* Sept. 1897 and *La Légende du Tannhäuser* March 1898; reprinted in *Légendes du Moyen Age*, Paris 1903, pp. 65-109, 111-145.

² In *Beilage zur Allgemeinen Zeitung vom 23. und 24. März 1898*. Reprinted with some omissions in *Bunte Blätter*, Freiburg, 1910 pp. 28-60.

³ In *Characteristiken* Berlin 1901, pp. 24-45.

⁴ *Die Tannhäusersage* in *Neue Jahrbücher für das klassische Altertum, Geschichte und deutsche Literatur*, 1904, pp. 653-667.

the origin of the legend may be connected with the Venus-mountain of classical fame in Cyprus, where Tannhäuser's story was localized possibly because the poet refers to his having suffered shipwreck in Crete. Dübi⁵ repeated and amplified the arguments of Gaston Paris in support of the Italian origin of the entire legend; only the staff-miracle was regarded as a German addition. Further material was presented to prove that the story came from Italy thru Switzerland. A comprehensive presentation of the subject, with full cognizance of the arguments of previous investigators, was given by Wolfgang Golther.⁶ He traces the beginnings of the legend to the checkered career of the well known minnesinger, to whom a fairy-tale was attached soon after his death. The myth of the *Venusberg* and the staff-miracle are regarded as subsequent additions. Friedrich Pfaff,⁷ on the other hand, connects the Venusberg with the legend from its very beginning. Possibly a visit of Tannhäuser to the shrine of the Cyprian Venus may have started the story in which the *Venusberg* was of fundamental importance. The legend with all its characteristic features, including the staff-miracle was developed in Germany by the end of the 14th century. Elster⁸ believes that the story was invented by zealous adherents of the church as a terrible example to the church's enemies. He too thinks that the *Venusberg* figured in the legend from the very start, but the staff-miracle he explains as a late anti-papal addition. The Italian origin of the legend with all its important traits is again maintained by the Danish scholar Nyrop,⁹ whose arguments are practically a repetition of those of Gaston Paris. The latest contribution to the subject is an article by Barto¹⁰ who controverts Kluge's arguments for the

⁵ *Frau Vrene und der Tannhäuser in Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde* 17, 1907, pp. 249-264.

⁶ *Tannhäuser in Sage und Dichtung des Mittelalters und der neuen Zeit, Walkalla*, Munich, 1907, 3, pp. 15-67.

⁷ In *Verhandlungen der 49. Versammlung deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner* Leipzig, 1907, pp. 104-107.

⁸ *Tannhäuser in Geschichte, Sage und Dichtung*, Bromberg, 1908.

⁹ *Tannhäuser i Venusbjaerget in Fortid Sagn og Sange*, Copenhagen, 1907-9, 6, 1 ff.

¹⁰ *Studies in the Tannhäuserlegend* in the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 9, July 1910, pp. 293-320.

Italian origin of the *Venusberg*-myth and attempts to prove that it sprang from later conceptions connected with the Holy Grail.

This concise chronological survey shows great differences of opinion, not only concerning details and minor features of the legend, but concerning questions of fundamental import. Especially is this true in regard to the *Venusberg*, which by some is held to be a cardinal and basic feature of the legend, present from its very inception, while others consider it extraneous to the primitive form and assert that it was introduced at a later stage of development. Also, whether this feature originated in Germany or in Italy, is still an open question. Moreover, while most scholars assume the identity of the legendary and historical Tannhäuser, there are some who question this and are inclined to assign to the hero a purely mythical character. The origin and significance of the staff-miracle is also very much in dispute, and as to minor details, the most divergent views have been advanced. In this essay the arguments concerning the chief points in dispute will be critically examined with a view to ascertaining what may be regarded as probable, or at least reasonably certain, and to do away with what is clearly erroneous or untenable. It will be impossible to dispense entirely with speculation and hypothesis in investigating the origin of a legend, the earliest stages of which are not attested by literary monuments, but, it is hoped, that conjecture will always be offered as such and not be presented for fact.

THE ITALIAN VERSIONS OF THE LEGEND ¹¹

Gaston Paris was led to his conclusions as to the Italian origin of the legend by the striking parallels found in Italy. There a tradition, which offers a resemblance to the Tannhäuser-story too close to be merely accidental, is connected with the Monte della Sibilla in the duchy of Spoleto between Norcia and Ascoli. Its first recorded appearance in literature is in the romance "Guerino il Meschino" by Andrea dei Magnabotti (1391). The hero, in search of information concerning

¹¹ These versions are summarized and discussed in the essays of Gaston Paris, Kluge, Dübi, Golther, and Nyrop.

his parentage, is advised to apply to the Cumean Sibyl of ancient prophetic fame, whose abode is no longer at Cumae, but in the mountain near Norcia. He succeeds in penetrating thru the cave to the subterranean paradise, where he stays for a year. The pious knight, who is not urged on by wanton lust, but by the desire to obtain much needed information, stoutly resists the blandishments of the fay and her damsels, whose sinister nature he suspects, and, tho he does not succeed in accomplishing his purpose, he quits the Sibyl's abode unstained by sin. His confession to the pope is consequently a mere formality and his absolution a matter of course. Much closer to the German form of the legend is the version given by the Provençal author Antoine de la Sale,¹² who visited the fabled mountain in 1420 and claims to have heard the story from the inhabitants of Montemonaco, a village situated on the slope of the mountain. It is found in the "Salade", written between 1438 and 1442, and tells how a German cavalier and his squire, impelled by unholy curiosity, enter the Sibyl's kingdom and revel for a year in its forbidden pleasures. At last the knight is awakened to a realization of the sinfulness of his stay thru witnessing the uncanny transformation of the fair ladies every Saturday night into adders and scorpions; he tears himself away just before the expiration of the fatal period and hurries to Rome to confess to the pope. The latter, tho in his heart willing to absolve, feigns anger and delays. Meanwhile the knight, frightened by hints of impending prosecution, craftily insinuated by the squire, who regrets having left the pleasures of the fairy-realm, flees from Rome and in despair returns to the Sibyl's paradise. The pope conscience-stricken despatches messengers with the news of the absolution, but they arrive too late.

The resemblance of this story to that of Tannhäuser cannot be the result of coincidence. De Reumont, who was the first to call attention to it,¹³ declared the Italian story an echo

¹² Edited by Werner Söderhjelm, *Antoine de la Sale et la légende de Tannhäuser* in *Mémoires de la Société néo-Philologique à Helsingfors*, 2 (1897) pp. 101-167.

¹³ In a discourse delivered May 25, 1871 to the Società Colombaria of Florence, inserted in *Saggi di storia e letteratura* (Florence 1880)

of the German Tannhäuserlegend and Söderhjelm was of the same opinion. Gaston Paris, however, took a directly opposite view.

To complete the testimony for the legend in Italy mention must be made of the account given by the Swiss canon Felix Hemmerlin (Malleolus)¹⁴ who claims to have obtained his information while he was at the court of pope John in Bologna about 1420. There he saw a rustic (simplicianus) from Schwyz, who confessed to the pope that he had spent a year with the unclean spirits in the mountains near Norcia. With him were two companions from Germany (Alemania). At the end of a year he had torn himself away, but his companions, held by the spell of the damsels, remained. At Hemmerlin's intercession he received absolution from a specially designated papal confessor.

And lastly we have the testimony of the Dominican friar Leandro Alberti¹⁵ who characterizes the stories of the Sibyl's paradise as nursery-tales which he has heard in his youth. Here we learn that none of the Sibyl's lovers are forced to stay more than a year, but each year one of those who enter must remain.

From this it is clear that a legend containing all the essential features of the Tannhäuserlegend,—the entrance of the knight into a subterranean paradise, his repentance, his journey to Rome, his condemnation by the pope, his return in despair to the abode of sin and the pope's tardy repentance—was known in Italy at the end of the 14th century and localized on the Monte della Sibilla. But this evidence does not point further back than 1350. Now the chief argument for the Italian origin is that the appearance of the legend in Italy antedates the earliest references to it in German literature. It becomes necessary therefore to ascertain how far back the legend can be traced in Germany.

under the title *Un Monte di Venere in Italia*. See Paris, *Légendes*, p. 107, note 1.

¹⁴ In *De nobilitate et rusticitate dialogus* (Basel 1497) chap. 26, p. XCIII. I cite according to Dübi p. 251; see also p. 55.

¹⁵ *Descrittione di tutta l'Italia, XIII^a regione Marca Anconitana* (Bologna 1550). Passage cited by Dübi, op. cit. pp. 258 and 60 on the authority of Graf.

THE EARLIEST TRACES OF THE LEGEND IN GERMANY

In Germany the earliest explicit reference to the legend dates from 1453 and is found in Hermann von Sachsenheim's allegorical poem "Die Mörin",¹⁶ where *Der Tannhuser* is mentioned as the husband of Dame Venus (l. 838), whose abode is called *Venusberg* (l. 156). The place seems to be located somewhere in the East; the description of the scenery exhibits Oriental coloring. We meet elegant knights and fair ladies. An old gray-bearded man who looks

Als ob er wear der Eckhard,

Von dem man sagt, in Venusbergk (ll. 28, 29).

informs the poet:

Guot man, frou Venus Min

Hat in erkorn zus underhemd (ll. 834, 835).

He also tells him:

Als by ainr predig tuot ain gaiß

Also so siezt er by der ee (ll. 840, 841),

from which it would appear that the knight was a reluctant lover whom Venus had lured into her realm. But no details are given; the poet evidently takes it for granted that his readers are acquainted with the legend.

There are also a number of mastersongs to be considered. Unfortunately it is impossible with most of them to fix the date of their composition with anything like accuracy. Two such poems, one a dialogue between Tannhäuser and Venus in which the knight expresses poignant repentance and hope for salvation thru the Virgin Mary, and the other a soliloquy called "Tannhusers Tagweis" expressive of similar sentiments, are preserved in a Karlsruhe manuscript from 1453.¹⁷ Of course, that is not necessarily the date of their composition. As far as the linguistic evidence is concerned, this date may be assigned to the beginning of the 15th century, and in the case of the former poem even earlier. A poem of similar tenor as the preceding is found among some shrovetide-plays of the

¹⁶ Ed. Ernst Martin, Tübingen, 1878, in *Bibliothek des literarischen Vereins zu Stuttgart*, 87.

¹⁷ Published by Mone in *Anzeiger für Kunde der deutschen Vorzeit*, 5, (1835) pp. 169-171; reprinted in Grässe, *Der Tannhäuser und Ewige Jude* (Dresden 1861) pp. 33-40. Extracts in Golther, *op. cit.* pp. 26-28.

15th century. It is a dramatic dialogue between Tannhäuser and Dame World.¹⁸ She tempts him with the blandishments of Venus, but he spurns them and invokes the aid of Mary. Then there are four poems in "Tanhusers haupt oder gulden ton" in the Colmar manuscript of mastersongs, also from the 15th century.¹⁹ Here likewise a sinner expresses his repentance and fear of hell but puts his trust in the Virgin. The *Venusberg* and the pope's harsh sentence are plainly alluded to

wie geren ich got nun wonet bei
die pfaffen mir das wenden
der wilden zoberey
gelebt ich geren ein endt

And again

kaum ward mir geben buesse dort zuo Romen
man wil mich in den sunden schwer verdommen.

Evidently the whole legend was known to the poet.

Still another mastersong dealing with the legend is found in the Weimar manuscript written by Wolf Bauttnner in the 17th century.²⁰ Here Tannhäuser himself relates his story,—his stay in the *Venusberg*, his repentance, his pilgrimage to Rome and the pope's refusal to absolve. But no mention is made of the staff-miracle. Still the knight does not return to Venus; he continues to hope for God's mercy:

got kainem sünder nie verseit.
auf got bau ich die weil ich hab das leben.

When this song was first written is not known; probably not before the 16. century.²¹

Now all the mastersongs (except those in the Colmar MS)

¹⁸ Keller, *Fastnachtspiele aus dem 15. Jahrhundert. Nachlese Bibl. lit. Ver.* 46, No. 124, pp. 47-53; extract in Golther, *op. cit.* p. 29.

¹⁹ Published by Zingerle in *Germania* 5, pp. 361-365; reprinted in Grässe *op. cit.* pp. 70-73.

²⁰ Published by Goedeke in *Germania* 28 (1883) p. 44; reprinted in Golther, *op. cit.* pp. 32, 33.

²¹ See Golther p. 33. Goedeke regarded this as the oldest known Tannhäuser-poem because the staff-miracle is lacking; but the poet probably omitted it to bring about a more satisfactory ending. Nyrop *op. cit.* p. 14 simply dates the poem about 1453 without attempting any proof and uses it as an argument for the priority of the Italian versions.

show such unmistakable correspondences with the famous folksong which offers what may be called the vulgate version of the legend, that there must be dependency somewhere, and there is little doubt that the folksong is their basis.²² For, altho the song did not appear in print until 1515, its origin is much older. Faber in his "Evagatorium" about 1484 refers to it as known all over Germany.²³ The Bavarian chronicler Johannes Turmair or Aventin (died 1534) also testifies to the fame of Tannhäuser's exploits and adds: "man heisst noch die alten Meistergesäng von ihm sprichwortsweiss der alt Danhäuser."²⁴ In Hans Sachs' "Veneris Hofgesind" (1517) Tannhäuser is made to say of himself, "mein nam der ist gar weit erkant". Agricola in his collection of proverbs (1529) refers to the legend as a commonplace. So by the end of the 15. century Tannhäuser's name and exploits had become proverbial in Germany. A poem—and notice that Faber uses the singular—celebrating these exploits was widely known by 1484; mastersongs written before 1453 presuppose the existence of such a poem, which therefore, if not identical with the *Volkslied* as known to us, was at any rate its basis and consequently cannot well have arisen later than the beginning of the 15. century. Even if the legend were no older than the poem, its existence in Germany would thus be attested for a period almost as far back as its appearance in Italy. But already in the 14. century a legend of some kind was connected with the name of Tannhäuser in Germany. For, whether the well-known *Busslied* or penitential hymn contained in the Jena manuscript and ascribed to Tannhäuser himself be authentic or not, it surely has something to do with the legend and shows that even at this early date the Minnesinger was

²² See Golther, pp. 28, 29, 33. Reuschel, accepting Goedeke's opinion about the age of the Bauttner poem, thought this poem to be the basis of the folksong.

²³ "Unde de hoc carmen confictum habetur, quod manifeste a vulgo per Alemanniam canitur de quodam nobili Suevo, quem nominant Danhuser, de Danhusen villa prope Dünckelspüchel". Fabri *Evag.* ed. Hassler in *Bibl. Lit. Ver.*, 18, vol. 3, p. 221. See also Kluge, *Bunte Blätter*, p. 57.

²⁴ Grässe p. 25; Golther p. 30.

regarded as a typical penitent.²⁵ The mention in the folk-song of pope Urban IV. (1261-64), who actually was a contemporary of the poet, would indicate that the story took shape shortly after Tannhäuser's death about 1270 or so, before sufficient time had elapsed to confuse the dates. This is essentially the argument advanced by Erich Schmidt and Golther.²⁶ Gaston Paris,²⁷ however, pointed out that, when Urban IV. reigned, the historical Minnesinger must have been a sexagenarian and was therefore scarcely the proper hero for an adventure in the Venusberg. He believes the name of the pope came from Italy; de la Sale hesitates between Urban V. and Urban VI. For some reason or other the German poet changed it to Urban IV. Paris regards the historic accuracy as highly suspicious; "la légende ne connaît guère de telles précisions". True, and for that very reason the historic difficulty which distressed the learned Frenchman gave no trouble whatever to the unsophisticated author of the earliest Tannhäuser-poem, who would most likely put in the name of the pope whom he still remembered. For similar reasons de la Sale or his talesman introduced a pope who was nearer to their own time and evidently their versions did not tally.

It is clear, therefore, that a Tannhäuserlegend was known in Germany before we hear of a similar one in Italy. But the form which it had assumed in the 14. century can only be conjectured. From the *Busslied* it appears that that the repentant sinner was already at that time the central figure, but, whether the other features of the vulgate were already present in this *Urform*, is a question on which, as we have seen, there is a great difference of opinion. Particularly is this true in regard to the *Venusberg*, the origin of which must now be considered.

THE ORIGIN OF THE VENUSBERG

In any discussion of the Tannhäuserlegend the question of the *Venusberg* is of fundamental importance; without this

²⁵ Golther *op. cit.* pp. 20, 21.

²⁶ Schmidt in *Nord und Süd*, Nov. 1892, p. 179; Golther *op. cit.* p. 21; see also Schmidt *Charakteristiken*, 2, p. 28.

²⁷ *Légendes* pp. 129, 130.

feature the legend loses its individuality and much of its charm. Of course, the exponents of the Italian theory claim an Italian origin for this subterranean paradise. Kluge, who rejects such an origin for the entire legend, admits it for this particular feature. Golther postulates an independent origin for the myth and believes it was introduced into the legend at a subsequent stage of its development; whether it arose in Italy or in Germany he does not decide, but believes that the mountain referred to in the *Volkslied* is either the Monte della Sibilla or the Venus-mountain in Cyprus. Pfaff, on the other hand, maintains that the Venusberg was present in the legend from its very beginning. Barto, in opposition to Kluge, insists on the German origin of the myth, which he traces back to conceptions connected with the later development of the legends of Arthur and the Holy Grail.

From the numerous references cited in the essays of Kluge, Dübi, and Barto we gather the following results. From the middle of the 15. century on the *Venusberg* is frequently mentioned by German authors, and in the following century the myth is a commonplace in Germany. Allusion is made to it in the 15. century by the "Heldenbuch", Sachsenheim, Faber and Bernhard von Breitenbach; in the 16. by Murner, Sachs, the Zimmerische Chronik, Fischart and Paracelsus. Some of these references are to a mountain of love; others, however, are to a mountain of magic wholly different from the *Venusberg* of the Tannhäuserlegend. In these the place appears as one to which magicians and sorcerers resort to learn the black art. Especially is it frequented by the travelling scholars who there learn the tricks by which they dupe the credulous peasants.²⁸ In most of these references the locality of the mountain is left undefined; when a more exact localization is attempted it is placed in Italy or in Cyprus. Thus Faber and Breitenbach both know of a Venus-mountain in Italy, but assert that the one in Cyprus is the genuine one.²⁹

²⁸ See the article by Kluge entitled *Die fahrenden Schüler* in *Bunte Blätter* pp. 61 ff.; particularly the passages cited from Bebel's *Facetiae* (1508) and the *Liber Vagatorum* (1510).

²⁹ "Et hodie plures credunt Venerem in monte Veneris qui est in insula Cypri, ducere vitam voluptuosam cum suis cum qua canunt esse quendam dictum Tannhuser." Faber, op. cit. 1, p. 153.

Now the Italian mountain here referred to is the Monte della Sibilla of the Guerino-romance and de la Sale. In the 17. century this mountain was repeatedly identified with the Venusberg.³⁰ On the other hand, Kornemann's well-known "Mons Veneris" (1614) makes no attempt at localization; neither does a Czech version of the story of the Sibyl's paradise dating from 1579. The very existence of the Venusberg is emphatically denied by Nider (about 1470) and by Geiler von Keiserberg (about 1500).³¹

From all this it is clear that the story of the *Venusberg* had wide currency in Germany from the 15. to the 17. century; but the location was anything but fixed. Most of the German references give no information on this point; of those that attempt to assign to the mountain a definite location the majority point to Italy, particularly to Tuscany.

Now let us turn to the Italian testimony. It is strange that in Italy the name of Venus in connection with an enchanted mountain does not occur. The paradise described by de la Sale has all the characteristics of the German *Venusberg*, but nowhere is it ever called by any such name. It is always designated as the paradise of the queen Sibyl. The same is true of the Italian versions given by Leandro Alberti and the Guerino-romance. Now this designation must have been recent, for as has been pointed out by Romance scholars,³² the word *Sibilla* does not come from the vernacular, in which case its form would be either *Sevella* or *Sevolla*. It is evidently the invention of learned humanists. Nor is there any evidence to show that the legend is any older than the name. The earliest references in Italy to the fabled mountain near Norcia do not date further back than about the middle of the 14. century³³ the first in point of time being found in a sermon of Pierre Bersuire who died about 1362. But all these references are to a lake of Pilate or to a lake of the Sibyl to which nec-

³⁰ So by Frölich in his *Viatorium* (1644), by von Birken in *Brandenburgischer Ulysses* (1669), by the Jesuit Schönsleder in *Promptuarium Germanico-Latinum* (1681). See Kluge, pp. 59, 60.

³¹ Kluge *op. cit.* p. 35, note 1.

³² Paris *Légendes* p. 91, note 1; Kluge *op. cit.* p. 52.

³³ For these references see the essays of Kluge, Dübi and Barto.

romancers resort; not one reference to a mountain of love can be found in Italy before the *Guerino*-romance and even in the 15. and 16. centuries the mountain near Norcia was far better known as a mountain of magic than one of love. Even as such its fame cannot have been very great in Italy, for the learned humanist Eneo Silvio, later pope Pius II, when appealed to by his brother to find out for a distinguished German physician the location of a Venus-mountain in Italy where black art was taught, had difficulty recalling such a tradition to mind.³⁴ And in Italian literature the mountain and its legend never played much of a rôle; it is only casually referred to by Pulci, Ariosto and Trissino, and then in connection with magic, not love.³⁵ In Germany, on the other hand, the legend of the *Venusberg* enjoyed the greatest fame, else why should so many attempts be made by Germans to find the exact location of the fabled mountain? Why should German travelers visit Italy and Cyprus in search thereof? Why should the Italian versions of the story as given by Hemmerlin and de la Sale credit the adventure of the entrance into the forbidden paradise to a German or to Germans, even tho their names are not mentioned? Surely Kluge was right, when, in view of this evidence, he asserted the German origin of the Tannhäuser-legend against Gaston Paris, and claimed that the account in the "Salade" was but an echo of the German story. But he should have gone still further and like Barto rejected also the hypothesis of the Italian origin of the *Venusberg*.

It has been noted by different scholars that the German *Venusberg* is more appropriately named than the Italian Monte della Sibilla. If the latter had been originally famed as a love-mountain, why was it not called Monte di Venere? The goddess of love was always well known in Italy, where

³⁴ Aeneas Sylvius, *Epistolae* I, 46, cited by Dübi *op. cit.*, p. 256. The letter dates from about 1431. Dübi says it shows that the legend was not yet localized in Germany; he should have said the *Venusberg*. Evidently the myth was already well known there. Notice also that the *Venusberg* was regarded both as famous for magic as well as for love, whereas in Italy Eneo knows only of its magic repute.

³⁵ See Dübi *op. cit.*, pp. 257, 258.

classic tradition never died out.³⁶ That the name of Venus should have been substituted in Germany for that of the less familiar Sibyl, as Nyrop contends, is wholly incredible.³⁷ The Sibyl was not at all unknown in Germany. She is mentioned in the "Wartburgkrieg";³⁸ her prophecies are the subject of a lengthy mastersong.³⁹ If an Italian Sibyl's paradise had been imported into Germany it is safe to say it would have appeared there as a *Sibillenberg*; but there never was such a mountain in Germany.

From what has been said there is no ground for believing that the Italian legend of the Sibyl's paradise existed previous to the 14. century, tho the Grotto near Norcia seems to have been reputed for magic. Learned humanists, who heard of this fabled grotto and who knew from Virgil that the Sibylla Cumana lived in a cave, originated the name Monte della Sibilla. But the legend which they heard was not concerning a mountain of love, else they would have called this mountain a Monte di Venere; what they did hear was a story of necromancy and in such the Sibyl was not out of place. For let it be remembered that the medieval conception of the Sibyl was not as a seductive and amorous fay, but rather as the stern prophetess, half Christian, half pagan, that we know from the *Dies Irae* and the frescoes of Michael Angelo in the Sistine chapel. From prophetess to enchantress the gradual transition is intelligible enough. When she became connected with the ill-famed mountain near Norcia it was in her capacity as prophetess. In the Guerino-romance she still plainly exhibits her original character, for Guerino visits her to obtain information. In de la Sale's account, however, she appears only as the wicked enchantress, the exact counterpart of the German Venus. This transformation in her character is, I believe, due to the influence of the Tannhäuserlegend, which had by that time been carried to Italy by German travel-

³⁶ See L. Friedländer *Das Nachleben der Antike im Mittelalter* in *Die Deutsche Rundschau* 92 (1897), pp. 370 ff.

³⁷ *Fortids Sagn*, p. 82.

³⁸ Ed. Simrock, Stuttgart & Augsburg, 1858, Strophe 82.

³⁹ *Sibyllen Weissagung* publ. in Paul und Braune *Beiträge* 4. 48. See Vogt in *Grundriss der Germ. Phil.* 2. p. 296.

lers and wandering clerics. Possibly it was already known to the author of the *Guerino-romance* and affected his conception of the Sibyl. At any rate, to Italian authors of the 16. century she appeared rather as the demonic sorceress than the seductive nymph. So for instance in Trissino's "*L'Italia liberata da' Goti*" (1547-8), tho here she has a retinue of amorous nymphs.⁴⁰ Ariosto knows of the grottoes near Norcia as infested by demons thru whose aid Merlin was enabled to construct a palace in one night.⁴¹ Surely, if the story of the

La sala ch'io dicea ne l'altro canto,
Merlin col libro, o fosse al lago Averno,
O fosse sacro alle Nursine grotte,
Fece far dai demonii in una notte.

Sibyl's paradise is really an old Italian folk-myth, it never found its way into literature, where it plays an insignificant rôle. Whatever prominence it attained in Italy seems to be due to the fame of the related *Tannhäuser*-legend.

We conclude then that the origin of the *Venusberg* cannot be traced to a legend connected with a particular mountain in Italy; nor to one connected with any particular mountain anywhere else. To be sure, we hear of Venus-mountains in Germany as well as elsewhere, but in almost every case it can be shown that the legend to which they owe their name was attached to them at a late date. The *Hörselberg* in particular was not identified with the *Venusberg* before the 19. century and owes its fame chiefly to Wagner. In older tradition it is represented as the abode of departed spirits, a place of horror and gloom, whence issued fearful sounds, supposed to be the wails of the damned, for which reason it was called in ancient chronicles *Mons Horrisonus*.⁴² A variant of the *Tannhäuser*-legend is attached to the *Schönberg* near Freiburg in Breisgau; but the introductory story of *Tannhäuser* in the realm of the heathen goddess is lacking. The age of this tradition has not been definitely ascertained and its relation to the *Volkslied* is a disputed question.⁴³

⁴⁰ See Gaston Paris. *Légendes* p. 94, note.

⁴¹ *Orlando furioso* Canto 33, Strophe 4:

⁴² For this tradition see Grässe *op. cit.*, pp. 1-6.

⁴³ The story is known only from the account given by Schreiber in

The persistent attempts to explain the origin of the *Venusberg*-myth by identifying the goddess with supposed goddesses like Holda and Berchta, even if these identifications were tenable, are absolutely futile. Only by a *tour de force* of interpretation can these goddesses be regarded as amorous queens. As represented in Germanic mythology they are neither beautiful nor seductive and their abodes in mountains are dismal and joyless and wholly unlike the paradise of sensual love to which Tannhäuser is lured. Gaston Paris was perfectly right in rejecting all these and similar arguments.⁴⁴

Yet the conception of a realm of love ruled by a queen is a commonplace in late medieval literature and frequently enough this queen is Venus. On Germanic soil such a realm is met with already at the beginning of the 14. century in the Dutch romance "Die Kinder von Limborch" by Hein van Aken finished by 1318.⁴⁵ There the hero in search of his sister comes to a forest, which he traverses, and reaches a fair plain with a splendid castle. He is received with all kindness by Venus and her ladies, but is compelled to remain for two years until his companion Echites arrives (Book V), when both are allowed to depart. The stay of the knight, to be sure, is compulsory; he is threatened with death in case of refusal;⁴⁶

Taschenbuch für Geschichte und Alterthum in Süddeutschland, Freiburg 1839 p. 348 ff. whence it was taken by Grässe, p. 12; Kluge doubts that the story is old (*Bunte Blätter* p. 30); Golther (*op. cit.*, p. 36) thinks it to be the content of a lost Tannhäuser-poem; Pfaff (*op. cit.* p. 104) regards it as an independent variant.

⁴⁴ *Légendes*, p. 131. See also Golther *op. cit.* p. 35 and Mogk, *Mythologie in Grundr. Germ. Phil.* II, p. 278.

⁴⁵ See te Winkel in *Grundr. Germ. Phil.* 2, p. 433; Jonckblot *Gesch. der niederl. Lit.* tr. by Berg, Leipzig 1870, 1, pp. 280, 281. Barto erroneously puts the date at 1357 and speaks of the realm as a *Venusberg*. The poem, however, knows only of a forest (*Venuswoud*).

⁴⁶ *Roman van Henric en Margriete van Limborch* ed. by L. Ph. C. van den Bergh (Leiden, 1846) Vol 1:

Ghi moet hier in miin conincrike
Bliven ghevaen, nu gaet met mi (ll. 1192-3).

And again:

ghi habt recht, en dadiis niet
Ic scotu doet met derre stralen. (ll. 1196-7).

but otherwise it is exceedingly pleasant. The Venus of this poem has little in common with the demoniac temptress of the Tannhäuserlegend; she is simply the conventional Love-queen familiar from medieval allegory. There is really nothing sinful about her. She says of herself (ll. 2068-72):

Ghi wet wel ic ben geheten
Vrouwe over gherechte minne,
Ende waer ontrouwe es inne
Soe ben ic ene sware wrake
Ende wreke altoes dese zake....

Far from being a seductress, she is the source of all virtue; her servitors must be blameless. For the German origin of the *Venusberg* this reference proves nothing. The author drew largely from foreign sources;

Seide d'Walsch daer ict inlas (l. 1170).

Moreover the Venus-realm is localized in Calabria (l. 1115 ff.) and is in no way conceived as a hollow-hill or underground paradise.⁴⁷ In connection with the origin of the *Venusberg* the prominent part assigned in medieval literature to the ancient goddess of love cannot be disregarded. The blameless Queen of Love, before whose tribunal all questions concerning the gentle passion are decided, is a heritage from the silver age of Latin literature.⁴⁸ Venus as queen and residing in a splendid castle figures in the poems of Claudian; as judge and arbiter of erotic questions she appears in the "Pervigilium Veneris", an anonymous poem of the second century.⁴⁹ These conceptions found high favor with troubadours and

⁴⁷ Barto's arguments (*op. cit.* pp. 303, 308) based on this reference are not valid because his information concerning the poem is incomplete and inaccurate. The assertion that this is the first appearance of the *Venusberg* in literature is entirely erroneous.

⁴⁸ For a discussion of this subject see Neilson, *The Origin and Sources of the Court of Love in Harvard Studies and Notes in Phil. and Lit.*, Boston 1899.

⁴⁹ Ed. Riese in *Anthologia Latina* (Leipzig 1869) No. 200, pp. 144-148.

Cras Dione dicit jura fulta sublimi throno (l. 7);

and again

Jussit Hyblaeis tribunal stare diua floribus.

Praeses ipsa iura dicet, adsidebunt Gratiae (ll. 49, 50).

courtly poets in France and Italy⁵⁰ and spread thru Europe. In Germany, too, Venus as Minne-queen is a prominent figure. With the Goliards or *scholares vagantes* she seems to have been a special favorite; they were untiring in singing her praises as the "*dulcis praepotens amoris regina*"⁵¹ The number of Middle High German poems dealing with Venus and her allegorical Court of Love is large and it is noteworthy that in this class of literature French influence is less conspicuous than in the courtly epic. Nor is this influence, so far as Love-allegory is concerned, as strong in Germany as it was in Italy or England. As a result this genre in Germany developed forms and traits not found elsewhere.⁵² Such a trait seems to be the hollow-hill paradise as the abode of the Minne-queen which we meet in a number of poems of the 14. and 15. centuries. In this connection the poems attributed to Meister Altswert and dating from the 15. century claim our special attention.⁵³ In "*Der Kittel*" Venus is represented as residing in a beautiful castle in a fair valley, but in "*Der Tugenden Schatz*" she is described as dwelling in a mountain and as ruling conjointly with Frou Ere:

Dirre berg was fro Venus allein

Nun ist er ir beder gemein (l. 7, 8, p. 83).

This abode is exceedingly splendid, abounding in jewels and treasure; gardens of delight furnish opportunity for continuous revelry. No attempt is made, however, to assign to this paradise a definite locality.

Nor is such an attempt made in the "*Mörin*", except that the introduction of unicorns and elephants as well as a general Oriental atmosphere conveys the impression that the *Venusberg* is somewhere in the far East. It bears but little resemblance to the real *Venusberg*. The poet evidently knew the *Tannhäuser* legend, but his chief interest was not in that, but in the insipid allegory with its fantastic accessories. The position of Venus is rather peculiar, for, while she is the real

⁵⁰ Neilson pp. 23 ff.

⁵¹ *Carmina Burana* in *Bibl. Lit. Ver.* 16, p. 139.

⁵² Neilson, *op. cit.* pp. 120-132.

⁵³ Ed. by Holland and Keller, *Bibl. Lit. Ver.* 21.

ruler, it is Danheuser, whom she has chosen as her spouse, who is expected to pass sentence on the accused poet. For the rest she is nothing more than the conventional Minnequeen familiar from the poems considered above. There is nothing about her to suggest the *teufelinne* of the *Volkslied*.

A true love-queen without a trace of allegorical attributes and dwelling in a mountain is met with in the poem of "Friedrich von Schwaben" which probably dates from the 14. century.⁵⁴ The hero, after traversing a large forest, comes to a beautiful field, where he is greeted by the dwarf-queen Jerome and enters her realm in a hollow mountain (*die holen berg*, l. 2509). It is described as a typical underground paradise inhabited by dwarfs who indulge in knightly pastimes. In spite of his pleadings the hero is detained and finally yields to the queen's blandishments. The fruit of their love is a child, which unlike its mother is of normal human stature;

wann sy was ain claines zwerg

Ir frucht was gen ir ain berg. (ll. 2869-70).

In the end the knight is allowed to depart.

And here we are face to face with a significant feature of the legend that has been ignored by previous investigators,—the presence of dwarfs in the Venus-mountains. Dwarfs invariably figure in the German Love-mountains, and often also in purely allegorical love-realms. In the poem just mentioned the queen herself as a dwarf. In the "Mörin" it is a malicious dwarf who helps Eckart capture the poet and leads the way to the *Venusberg* (ll. 155-6). In "Der Kittel" the poet's guide is invisible thru a tarn-cap,—a characteristic dwarfish attribute. In "Der Tugenden Schatz" a dwarf guards the entrance to the hollow mountain and acts as the poet's guide and instructor. Dwarfs are mentioned in all the oldest Tannhäuser-poems. In the Swabian dialogue Venus says:

ich han so vil der edlen zwerg,
helt die müssen dienen dir
mit stechen, singen, seitenspil. . .

⁵⁴ Ed. by Jellinek in *Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters herausgegeben von der Königl. Preuss. Akad. der Wissensch.* 1 (Berlin 1904). The oldest datable MS. is from 1464.

And again :

ewer selend dienen mine zwerg
ewer truren gewint ein ende.

In the "Fastnachtspiel" Dame World speaks to Tannhäuser
Asterot die fragt nach dir
Fraw Venus lat dich in den berek :
bald so kom du hin zu ihr
so enphahen dich die edlen twerck. . . .

And in the High German version of the *Volkslied*, when Venus gives her consent to her lover's departure, she bids him take "urlob von dem greisen". This passage has been a *cruz* to commentators; it has been suggested that the old Eckart is meant. But the Low German version has the plural "van den grysen" and with this the Dutch version and that of Korne-mann agree. Most likely therefore the reference is to dwarfs.⁵⁵

The *Venusberg* then shows unmistakable kinship with the underground dwarf-abodes of Germanic folklore. Dwarf-kings, like Laurin, Goldemar and Alberich, are familiar to all students of Middle High German literature; and dwarf-queens like Virginal and Albiun are also well known. But their kingdoms are not realms of love and these queens are not seductive temptresses. The *Venusberg*-myth cannot be traced back to such sources. The distinctive feature of the amorous queen is lacking in them. Elves who entice mortals into their realm are familiar figures in German folklore, but they are not conceived as queens ruling a paradise in a hollow mountain. Comparisons between the *Venusberg* and the enchanted mountain-abodes occurring in legends of the Kyffhäuser-type, so wide-spread in all Germanic lands,⁵⁶ are also inadequate as an explanation. These realms were originally the habitations of departed spirits and, altho now peopled by emperors and kings with splendid retinues, they are not abodes of joy, least of all of love. No Minne-queen rules there. Nor can such a

⁵⁵ The Bauttner-poem reads "von dem grünen reise" and Reuschel believes that this was the original reading. But he takes it for granted that this is the oldest of the extant Tannhäuser-poems, which is more than doubtful.

⁵⁶ See Golther, *Handbuch der Germanischen Mythologie* (Leipzig 1895) p. 89; Mogk in *Grundriss* 3, p. 257.

one be found in the fabled mountain, where according to a tradition alluded to in the "Wartburgkrieg,"⁵⁷ Arthur holds court with a goodly company of knights and ladies.

Felicia, Sibillen kint,
und Juno, die mit Artus in dem berge sint,
die habent vleisch sam wir und ouch gebeine.

In strophe 86 the poet claims to have his information from no less a personage than St. Brandan, who is likewise in this mountain, from which, among other champions, Loherangrin is sent forth on his well known mission. We have here a blending of the Celtic traditions concerning Avalon and the Terra repromissionis of the Brandan-legend with a legend of the Kyffhäuser type and the story of the Holy Grail. But nowhere in this poem is this mountain represented as anything like a *Venusberg*, as Barto would have us believe.⁵⁸ This tra-

⁵⁷ Ed. Simrock (Stuttgart and Augsburg 1858), strophe 83.

⁵⁸ *Studies* p. 312 ff. As Barto's chief argument for deriving the Tannhäuserlegend from that of Arthur and the Grail is based on his interpretation of strophes 82-87 of the poem, a brief criticism may be in order. Connection of our legend with Arthurian romance was already suspected by Menzel (according to Grässe p. 29) and Grässe also called attention to these strophes (op. cit. pp. 17, 30). Like Barto he considered them by themselves. That they refer to Arthur and The Grail is unquestioned (see Martin, *Zur Gralsage in Quellen und Forschungen* 42, p. 34 ff.) But the place appears here as anything but a place of sin. The mere presence of women does not stamp it as such. The king himself is repeatedly characterized as "wandels vrî" (Lohengrin, ed. Rückert, ll. 404, 511 et passim). As regards the women, the Sibyl, as we had occasion before to point out, was not necessarily an evil creature; and here she seems to fit in as a prophetess. At any rate, her daughter Felicia appears in such a rôle in strophe 84. Therefore the fact that the latter is still a maiden should not arouse suspicion; the gift of prophecy and virginity are associated (bi derselben wirde hat si mir gesaget 84). Moreover she is with St. Brandan whose saintliness is above suspicion. Furthermore, if she be identical with Vrou Saelde, her character must be free from taint. In "Diu Crone" that lady is represented as the foster-mother and protectress of Arthur, who is repeatedly referred to as "der saelden sun" (l. 5028 et passim). That she is mentioned in one breath with *minne* is no argument against her; The medieval idea of *minne* warrants no such inference. Besides we find "Got, Saelde und vrou Minne" occurring in one line (l. 17213). The relations of Vrou Saelde to the king are therefore eminently proper, and the sinister significance attributed to them by Barto is wholly unjustified. (See

dition, therefore, cannot be used to explain the origin of the myth, but it furnishes valuable testimony to show how prone the German fancy was to conceive of the Otherworld as a hollow-mountain paradise.

Some scholars profess to find the sources of the myth in the fairylore of Arthurian romance which found its way into every European literature. But the fays of these romances, tho they often have a queenly character and in this respect resemble the German Venus, do not live in mountains. Fairie in medieval French romance assumes many different names and shapes.⁵⁹ It may be an enchanted valley (*Le Vallon des Faux Amants*, *Val sanz Retor*) an island (*Isle Celée*, *Isle d'Or*), an inaccessible, faraway land (*Terre Lointaine*), a forest (*Forêt sanz Retor*), a splendid castle (*Chastel as Pucèles*). It may be located on a mountain, as Morgain's castle on Mt. Mongibello in Sicily.⁶⁰ But nowhere in French literature do

Zingerle, *Frau Sælde nach Heinrich von dem Türlin*, Germ. 8, 414 ff.) And then the religious character of the place. First the king and priests pray before the Grail, then the ladies and, when all this does not avail, the innocent maidens are sent. Felicia helps to array them in proper fashion (Loh. 49). In fact we have here a sacred Grail-realm. Only by the most one-sided interpretation can it be construed as a *Venusberg*.

The contention that the degeneration of the Arthurian legend, noticeable in "Diu Crone", began in and was peculiar to Germany seems to me, entirely wrong. It is already evident in the "Lancelot" of Chretien (about 1170), and Ulrich von Zatzikhoven (about 1195. See Vogt in *Grundr.* 2, pp. 195, 208), as well as in the still older French "lais du Cor" and "del Mantel maltaillie". The incidents there related are quite sufficient to bring shame upon Arthur, even tho he himself be blameless. The passages from the mastersongs adduced by Barto (p. 317) do not imply the king's personal guilt.

As for the word *gral*, it is true that at a later period it came to mean, particularly in Northern Germany, a festival or carousal, and then even sinful pleasure. It could therefore very well become synonymous with *Venusberg*. But that proves nothing as to the origin of the myth. Dietrich von Niem (about 1410), alluding to a tradition similar to the *Venusberg*, attached to a mountain near Pozzuoli, uses the word in its later sense, but does not connect it with Venus. Such connection is not attested before the end of the 15th century, and cannot be taken as the starting-point of the myth, which is much older.

⁵⁹ See Paton, *Studies in the Fairy Mythology of Arthurian Romance* in *Radcliffe College Monographs* No. 13 (Boston 1903) p. 40, note 2.

⁶⁰ In *Floriant et Florete*, (13 century).

we meet with a fairy-realm in a hollow mountain corresponding to the *Venusberg*. Avalon, Morgain's special realm and the fairyland *par excellence* of the whole *Matière de Bretagne*, is generally described as an island, "un isle qui mult est beals".⁶¹ Sometimes, especially in English sources, Avalon appears as a vale. Only in German poems is it ever spoken of as a mountain, and there it is the abode of the fay Melusine, not of Morgain.⁶² So the origin of the German *Venusberg* cannot simply be referred to a Breton fairy-tale transmitted to Germany thru French mediation. If such transmission is assumed, it remains to be explained why the change was made in regard to the fairy paradise. It is certainly more reasonable to trace the myth to some land where the conception of the fairy-paradise in the hollow hill is at home.

Now the most significant parallels, not only to the *Venusberg*, but to the entire Tannhäuserlegend, are not found in France or Italy (excepting of course the Italian versions discussed above), but in the British isles and the Scandinavian North.

The resemblance of the story of Thomas of Erceldoune, as told in a Middle English poem⁶³ and in a Scotch ballad, to that of Tannhäuser has attracted attention before,⁶⁴ but a connection has not been proven. But it is undeniable that the parallelism is close, closer than between our legend and any other story of fairy-abduction. Like the German hero, Thomas

⁶¹ Lanval ed. Warnke v. 661. See also Geoffrey of Monmouth Bk. 11, ch. 2; ad sananda vulnera in insulam Avallonis advectus... See Paton p. 25.

⁶² Tübing von Ruggeltingen, *Historie der Melusine* etc. For titles see Goedeke, *Grundriss zur Gesch. der deutschen Dichtung* (Dresden 1884) 1, p. 355.

⁶³ Ed. Murray in *Early Engl. Text. Soc.*, 61 (London 1875) and Brandl in *Sammlung engl. Denkmäler* 2 (Berlin 1880).

⁶⁴ Simrock believed the two stories to be identical (*Deutsche Mythologie* 1874, p. 330) and suggested a connection between Hörselberg and Ercildoune. Weston also is convinced that there is some connection (*Legends of the Wagner Drama* (London 1903, p. 353). But, even if the two names were etymologically identical, it would prove nothing for the identity of the legends, since the connection between the Hörselberg and the Tannhäuserlegend is late. See also Burnham, *A Study of Thomas of Ercildoune* in *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.* 23 (1908) pp. 390-1.

has also been identified with a historical personage of the 13. century. The lady who entices him is a real queen; her abode a real underground paradise beneath Eldon Hill. Unlike Tannhäuser, Thomas enters the hill reluctantly:

Allas he sayd wa es mee!
 I trowe my dedis wyll wirke me care.
 My saulle, Jesu, byteche i the,
 Whedirsome ever my banes shall fare (Fytte I, 27).

But once in fairie he is quite happy and is loath to depart. In the Scotch ballad he is summoned to return to the mountain by the apparition of a hart and a hind,—sure signs of a fairy-message. He follows against his will and is seen no more. But the religious element, which looms so large in the German legend, plays a very subordinate part. As a result of his adventure Thomas gets the gift of prophecy; in fact, the fairy-abduction serves only as a setting for the historical prophecies with which the Middle English poem is mainly concerned.

Apart from the subject-matter the English romance shows some remarkable correspondences to the German *Volkslied*. Thomas pledges his unconditional loyalty (Fytte 19):

Here my trouthe i plyghte to the,
 Whethir pou will in heven or helle,

and yet later on hesitates to enter Eldon Hill. So Venus reminds her lover:

ir habt mir ainen aid geschworn:
 ir wölt von mir nit wenken.

and Tannhäuser makes vehement denial. Can it be that originally he did give such an oath? Again in the German poem the hero abruptly turns and exclaims:

fraw Venus, edle fraw so zart!
 ir seid ain teufelinne,

whereupon he is rebuked. No explanation is given why he suddenly thinks the goddess to be a fiend. In the English poem the lady loses her beauty after Thomas has enjoyed her love, and, according to an interpolated passage in one MS.,⁵⁵ this makes him think she is the devil, whereupon he likewise is rebuked. The Italian versions of the Tannhäuser-story

⁵⁵ The Lansdowne MS. See Burnham *op. cit.* pp. 381-2.

and some of the Swiss variants also know of a hideous weekly transformation of the ladies, which brings to the cavalier a realization of the sinful nature of his surroundings. This feature would seem therefore to have belonged to the original form of the story. Again Tannhäuser is enjoined by Venus to sing her praise wherever he goes; similarly the elfin-queen says to Thomas:

Whare ever þou fare by frythe or felle,

I praye the, speke none evyll of me. (Fytte 2, strophe 3.)

Other resemblances that might be pointed out are too commonplace in fairy-lore to carry weight. Thus the length of Tannhäuser's stay in the *Venusberg* is in most of the versions given as one year, but in the Dutch poem as seven. The same variation is found in the English romance, a twelve month (1, 26) and seven years (in the Cambridge MS). In a Swiss variant the hero falls asleep under a fig-tree and in a dream is bidden to repent; so Thomas sees the elfin-queen while he is reposing under a tree.⁶⁶ Her command:

Take leve Thomas at sonne and mon

And also at lefe that grewes on tree

reminds us of the touching lines in the Low German version, where the knight, before entering the mountain, gives a last glance at earth:

Godt gesegen dy Suenne und Maen

Darto myne leuen Freunde.

Another parallel to our legend, already noticed by Grässe, is the Scotch ballad of Young Tamlane,⁶⁷ where the hero, however, is rescued from fairie thru the heroism of his sweetheart. The elfin-queen, furious at the loss of her lover, exclaims:

But had I kenned, Tamlane, she says

A lady wad borrow'd thee—

I wad ta'en out thy twa grey een,

Put in twa een o' tree.

⁶⁶ The motive is a commonplace in fairy-lore. In *Sir Orfeo* the fairy-king likewise approaches the queen while she is asleep under an "impe-tree".

⁶⁷ Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (Edinb. 1880) 2, pp. 337-350.

In a Norse story of fairy-abduction the hero does not escape this sad fate. Helgi Thorisson, who has been enticed by Ingiborg, daughter of the mythical king Gudmund of Glaesisvellir, returns to earth blinded. The jealous fay, before releasing him, puts out his eyes so that the women of Norway shall take no joy in him.⁶⁸ Here we encounter the motif, familiar from Celtic and other medieval romance, that the hero who enters fairie cannot return unscathed. The realm to which Helgi is enticed is not conceived as a hollow-hill paradise. Such a paradise, however, is that of king Dofri in the *Kjalnesinga-saga*.⁶⁹ There Bui, the son of Harald Harfagr, stayed for some time with Frid, the king's beautiful daughter.

These parallels from different lands so widely separated are unquestionably independent of each other; but they are rooted in a common soil, and that soil is Celtic folklore. It is in Celtic literature that the amorous queen, the closest analogue to the German Venus, is most conspicuous, particularly in that kind of story represented by the Irish *Echtra*.⁷⁰ She is known to be the prototype of the fays that figure in the medieval romances dealing with the matter of Britain, which is admittedly of Celtic origin. But she is also the prototype of the elfin-queen that enticed Thomas the Rhymer into Eldon hill, for there can be no doubt that in this case we have Celtic material.⁷¹ The English romance originated near the Scotch border⁷² and popular tradition is embodied in the Scotch ballad, which seems to be entirely independent of the Middle English poem and to have its sources in folklore.⁷³ As for the

⁶⁸ *Páttir Helga Þórissonar in Fornmanna Sögur* (Copenh. 1827) 3, pp. 135 ff.

⁶⁹ Ed. *Islendinga Sögur* (Copenh. 1847) 2, pp. 395 ff. The episode in question is found in chap. 12-14.

⁷⁰ The classic example is the *Echtra Condla*. For a discussion of this genre see essay of Nutt *The Irish Vision of the Happy Otherworld* in Meyer and Nutt *The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal* (London 1895).

⁷¹ See Schofield, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer* (New York 1906) p. 199 ff.

⁷² Murray thinks the author was a Scotchman *op. cit.* p. XVII; Brandl assigns him to the North of England *op. cit.*, pp. 41, 42.

⁷³ In this connection compare the story of Meilerius and the elf recorded by Giraldus Cambrensis, *Itin.* 1, 10.

parallels adduced from Norse literature, they too seem to contain Celtic material. At least the story of Helgi belongs to a *genre* of late origin and admittedly subject to foreign influence.⁷⁴

In Celtic literature and folklore we meet with various conceptions of fairy-land, but two main types stand out prominently,—the Over-sea elysium and the hollow-hill paradise. Now the latter type, as was pointed out, is completely unknown to medieval French romance; nor does it play a rôle in any Romance literature. In Germanic lands, on the other hand, it is met with everywhere, in England and Scandinavia as well as in Germany, where kindred conceptions of dwarf-kingdoms and splendid courts in the interior of mountains were current from remotest times. In view of these facts it seems fatuous to seek the origin of the *Venusberg*-myth in Italy or on Romance soil. Nothing but the clearest proofs of the priority and originality of the Italian legend of the Sibyl's paradise could make such an origin credible, and such proofs are entirely lacking. The Sibyl-paradise is a wholly isolated phenomenon in Italian literature, and its existence cannot be attested prior to the middle of the 14. century, by which time the conception of fairy-realms in hollow mountains was already a commonplace in Germanic lands.

From the evidence thus far presented I infer that the legend of Venus and her fabled mountain arose in Germany thru a fusion of the Celtic conception of the amorous fairy-queen with the German traditions of dwarf-kingdoms and imperial courts in the interior of mountains. In Germany faerie would most naturally assume the shape of a hollow-hill paradise. The fay was called Venus because the heathen goddess was thoroughly familiar from the poetry of the Minnesingers and the Goliards. If the latter were responsible for the name, as some scholars maintain,⁷⁵ this would tend to confirm the

⁷⁴ See Müller *Sagabibliothek* (Copenhagen 1820) 3, pp. 238-251. The *þáttir* in question is not older than the 14th century. That the Icelandic sagas telling of expeditions to the Otherworld, especially *Óðáinsakr*, show Celtic influence, is now generally conceded. See Olrik, *Nordisches Geistesleben* tr. by Ranisch (Heidelberg 1908) p. 88.

⁷⁵ Kluge *op. cit.*, p. 55.

theory of the German origin, for the Goliards were practically unknown in Italy. Whether the Celtic fairy-queen came to Germany thru French mediation, as part of the *matière de Bretagne*, or directly from the British isles, I do not venture to decide. The evidence of the English and Scotch parallels seems to point in the latter direction. The question cannot be definitely settled until the literary relations between England and Germany during the Middle Ages are better known.⁷⁶

The assertion that the *Venusberg* is of German origin does not imply that the Italian Sibyl-paradise must be imported from Germany. At the basis of both myths is a conception rooted in Celtic folklore and with the matter of Britain this could come to Italy quite independently of Germany. The author of the *Guerino-romance*, who is also the author of the *Real di Francia*, was certainly conversant with French literature and with the Celtic material that figures so prominently therein. Let it be noted in passing that he sends his hero to St. Patrick's purgatory. Celtic legends may also have come in thru the Normans to whom some scholars are inclined to attribute the localization of the Arthurian fay Morgana on Mt. Aetna or Mongibel. That the British tradition concerning Arthur and his court was connected with this mountain in the 13. century is attested by Gervase of Tilbury⁷⁷ and Caesarius von Heisterbach.⁷⁸ But the king is not rep-

⁷⁶ For the 16th century these relations have been admirably set forth by Herford, *Studies in the Literary Relations of England and Germany in the 16th century* (Cambridge 1886). They were of no small importance and surely cannot have sprung up all at once. It is significant that we have in medieval German literature Celtic material that did not come in by way of France, e. g. the Irish legend of Tundale, which was first written down in Ratisbon by a monk, Marcus, who, it seems, was an Irishman. Irish monasteries existed in Ratisbon since 1076. See Wagner, *Visio Tnugdali* (Erlangen 1882) p. X and the introduction to Friedel and Meyer, *La Vision de Tondale* (Paris 1907). Furthermore, the *Wartburgkrieg* knows of a version of the St. Brandan-legend which differs materially from that attested by the extant Latin and French versions as well as the English and Irish versions dependent on these. See Schröder, *Sanct Brandan* (Erlangen 1871) p. IX.

⁷⁷ *Otia Imperialia*, I. 921; also Liebrecht *Des Gervasius von Tilbury Otia Imp.* (Hannover 1856) pp. 12 and 95.

⁷⁸ *Dialogus Miraculorum* ed. Strange 1851 Dist. XII, cap. XII.

resented as living in the mountain; his place is situated in a plain on the slope. Nor is there any mention of love's delights. Gervase simply describes the plain as "omnibusque deliciis plenam", but fails to indicate the presence of any feminine beings. The king reclining on a couch is evidently a reminiscence of the wounded Arthur in Avalon. There is no resemblance here to the Sibyl's paradise.⁷⁹ A proverb current in Sicily in the 14. century: "Malo esse in monte Bel cum regibus et principiis quam in coelo cum claudis et caecis"⁸⁰ also indicates that we have here nothing more than a legend of the Kyffhäuser-type without a trace of the erotic element. Traditions representing Mt. Aetna as the entrance to hell are wholly beside the point in this connection.⁸¹ The Mongibel-legend cannot be used to explain the Sibyl's paradise. Nor are the love-realms we meet with in Italian literature available for this purpose. Boccaccio's "Labirinto d'Amore" or the Venus-park in his "Corbaccio", the Venus-realm in Frezzi's "Quadriregio" (about 1403) and similar conceptions bear a purely conventional and allegorical stamp. The Sibyl's paradise has a wholly different character, resembling in most of its essentials traits the faerie of Arthurian romance, in which, moreover, a *Sebile l'enchanteresse* plays a rôle. No doubt, there is some connection, beyond the mere identity of name, between the French and the Italian fay and the sources of the Italian legend are to be sought in the *matière de Bretagne*.⁸² In that case the myth of the Sibyl's paradise is entirely independent of the German myth of the *Venusberg*. In the Italian legend this paradise is the main feature; the

⁷⁹ Nyrop *op. cit.*, pp. 86, 87 to the contrary. There we are told that Arthur and Morgain hold court in Mongibello. But these two personages are not mentioned together as living in Mt. Aetna. Morgain's palace is on the mountain, not within. On this point the testimony of the French *Floriant et Florete* is explicit. See Paton *op. cit.*, p. 250. The attempt to identify Morgain with the Sibyl involves wholly erroneous assumptions.

⁸⁰ Ludolf, *De Itinere Terrae Sanctae Liber*, ed. Deycks (*Bibl. Lit. Ver.* 25) Stuttgart 1851, p. 20.

⁸¹ For these see Mausser, *Die Geschichte vom Höllenberg in Walhalla* 6 (Leipzig 1910) pp. 250-8.

⁸² See Paton *op. cit.*, p. 52, note 2.

chief stress falls on the description of its allurements and its marvels. In the German Tannhäuserlegend, on the other hand, the *Venusberg* receives but scant notice; there the stress falls on the hero's sorrowful fate. Thru the influence of the German legend the Italian tradition of the Sibil's paradise expanded into the story which the people of Montemonaco told to de la Sale. Possibly also thru this same influence the Sibyl's realm assumed the character of a hollow-hill paradise.

THE NAME OF THE HERO OF THE LEGEND

If it is improbable that the *Venusberg* came from Italy it is far more improbable that the other features came from there. Yet such a provenience has been claimed for the hero of the legend, his German name notwithstanding.⁸³ Now in all the German versions and allusions this name is always the same, variations being purely dialectic or orthographic: Tannhuser in the mastersong, Tannhuser and Danhuser in Fabér, Danhauser in the High German *Volkslied*, Danhueser in the Low German version, Donhauser in Hans Sachs, Danyser in Danish. The old Flemish song has Daniel or Danielken, which seems to be a corruption of the real name, brought about in all probability by the identity of the first syllable with that in the Low German form, just as in modern Austrian variants the forms Antoni and Balthauser are due to consonance of some syllables with certain syllables in Tannhuser and Balthasar respectively.⁸⁴

In the Italian versions the knight is not named, but excepting the Guerino-romance, where Guerino himself undertakes the adventure, he is almost invariably reported to be a German. So distinctly by Hemmerlin and de la Sale. Nyrop makes light of this evidence and quotes de la Sale to the effect that the Germans were great travellers. This, I submit, is no argument at all. But the adherents of the Italian theory deny the identity of the legendary Tannhäuser with the historic Minnesinger of that name and claim that his name was introduced into the legend later on, possibly, as Paris suggests,⁸⁵

⁸³ By Paris, *Légendes*, p. 128; Nyrop *op. cit.* p. 44.

⁸⁴ See Erich Schmidt *op. cit.* p. 35; Nagl und Zeidler, *Deutsch-österreichische Literaturgesch.* (Vienna 1899) p. 264.

⁸⁵ *Légendes* p. 129.

because in the schools of the mastersingers it was associated with a certain rhythmical form or *ton* in which some of the earliest Tannhäuser-poems were written and which was ascribed to the poet himself. But this conjecture fails to explain why two Italian versions independent of each other concur in making the hero a German even if they do not name him. If he really was anonymous at the outset, it is very strange that all the versions agree on his German nationality and all the German versions, furthermore, agree as to his name. The swan-knight appears in literature under a variety of names, Helyas, Lohengrin, Lorengel or simply as the knight of the swan. But the hero of our legend, if he is named at all, has only one name and that is unmistakably German.⁸⁶ Yet the sources of the legend come from regions far apart and are not very near together in point of time.

Now it must be admitted that a stringent proof of the identity of the legendary and historical Tannhäuser has never been given. The *Busslied*, while expressing the poet's repentance for past sins, does not specify their nature. The *Tag-wise*, which is similar in tone, tells us that woman is the cause of the poet's trouble, "wibe schön hat mich geschand". Two of the songs in the Colmar MS. are more explicit; mention is made of "der wilden zoberey", clearly a reference to the *Venusberg* and its demoniac magic. But not one of these poems attributed to the minnesinger is authentic, with the possible exception of the *Busslied*, which is in doubt. The extant poems known to be authentic do not contain any allusion to an experience like that related in the folksong.

Furthermore the name of Tannhäuser as a family-name is attested for several places, especially for Switzerland and Austria.⁸⁷ The historical Minnesinger probably hailed from Bavarian-Austrian territory, more specifically from the neighborhood of Salzburg. As for the legendary Tannhäuser, accounts differ in regard to his home. In the "Mörin" he

⁸⁶ Unless the identity of Danielken and Tannhäuser be denied.

⁸⁷ See Dübi *op. cit.* p. 261; Tobler *Schweizerische Volkslieder in Bibl. älterer Schriftwerke der deutsch. Schweiz*, 5, (Frauenfeld 1882) p. 163, note; Nagl und Zeidler *op. cit.* p. 260 note 2, p. 261. Facsimile of the tomb of Chounrat Tannhawser (1483) *ibid.* p. 263.

is said to be from Frankenland; so also in the "Veneris Hofgesind" of Hans Sachs. Faber in his "Evagatorium" states that he came from Tanhusen near Dünkelsbühl in Swabia.⁸⁸ Not one of these allusions refers explicitly to the historic minnesinger. Some scholars regard the legendary hero as purely mythical⁸⁹ and the meaning of the name Tannhäuser, which is equivalent to *Waldhauser* or forestdweller, lends support to this view.

The question of Tannhäuser's identity was already debated in the 16. century. Aventin emphatically protests against the representation of the hero as a lover and insists that he was a great warrior; in fact, he identifies him with an old Gothic king Thananses (sic), whose warlike deeds had been perverted by "etliche alte Römer, vorauss Wolfram von Eschenbach" into gallant adventures in order to please the ladies.⁹⁰ Evidently he did not regard the legendary Tannhäuser and the historical minnesinger as one and the same person. Incidentally we may note that already at the time when Aventin wrote, nothing was known of the authorship of the *Volkslied*. In the following century Goldast⁹¹ credits it to Tannhäuser himself and explains the poem as a fling against the pope, the production of an imperial partisan.

But if the arguments for the identity of the historical and legendary Tannhäuser are not absolutely convincing, they are at least plausible.⁹² Of all the individuals bearing that name he is the only one known to fame, and this fame survived in the schools of the mastersingers until the 17. century. Moreover, the sensual character of his poetry, the wild and dissolute life of which it gives glimpses, his wanderings

⁸⁸ *Evag.* 3, p. 221.

⁸⁹ So Böckel, *Handbuch des deutschen Volksliedes* (Marburg 1908) p. 51.

⁹⁰ The passage is cited by Grässe *op. cit.* pp. 25, 26. Thananses stands for Tanausis, whose exploits are related by Jordanes in his *History of the Goths*, chap. 6. See Amersbach *Zur Tannhäusersage in Aleman-nia*, 24 (1895), pp. 74-83.

⁹¹ *Paraenetici veteres* (1604). Cited by Grässe p. 27.

⁹² They are fully stated by Erich Schmidt in *Nord und Süd*, Nov. 1892; see also *Characteristiken* 2, p. 24 ff. and the essays of Golther and Elster.

and adventures, including a shipwreck, his steadfast opposition to the papacy and finally the hints of repentance for past sin and folly,—all this lends color to the theory. That Urban IV, the pope mentioned in the folksong, and the poet were actually contemporaries may not be a proof positive of the identity of the historical and legendary hero, but it surely is not, as Paris and Nyrop would have us believe, an argument against it. That legends were readily attached to historical personages can be shown in numerous instances; we need only recall Wirnt von Gravenberg, Heinrich von Morungen, Neidhart von Reuenthal, Wolfram von Erschenbach and Thomas of Erceldoune.⁹³

After all the chief reasons for denying the identity in question was to uphold the theory of the Italian origin of the legend. The exponents of this theory in claiming the priority of the Italian version to the German one also claim that, therefore, the former is nearer to the primitive form of the legend. Consequently all those features not found in the Italian version must be subsequent German additions. In Germany the name of the paradise was changed to *Venusberg*, that of the hero to Tannhäuser, and the staff-miracle, as well as the figure of the trusty Eckhart, was introduced. I hope that for the *Venusberg* I have shown such an assumption to be very improbable. Still more so for the name Tannhäuser. It is difficult to understand how this assumption could ever be made in view of the fact that even the supporters of the Italian theory concede the unoriginal character of the Guerino and de la Sale versions.⁹⁴ The former, we are told, is nothing more than an edifying variant, the impeccable knight being contrasted with the sinner of the original story. What could this story have been like? It surely resembled that of the Salade, for the two versions, while independent of each other, must have a common source. Now de la Sale's account is palpably a recension, and not a very skilfull one either. The pope in merely pretending to hesitate with the absolution is represented in a rôle that is as unworthy as it is undignified; in fact, he is a mere trifler. The cavalier is not so much a re-

⁹³ See Golther *op. cit.* p. 22.

⁹⁴ Paris *Légendes*, p. 91; Dübi *op. cit.*, p. 257.

pentant sinner as he is a coward and a fool, and the squire is a useless addition. The chief concern of the narrator is with the Sibyl's paradise; the story itself is flabby and without backbone.⁹⁵ It bears on the face of it the evidences of being a weak-kneed recension of an older legend like the German one, with the rôle of the unforgiving pope softened and toned down. That this older form of the story first took shape in Italy, as Paris, Dübi and Nyrop assume, is simply incredible. Where is there an example from Italian or any Romance literature of a pope in such an odious rôle, which is moreover entirely opposed to the doctrine of the Catholic church, which teaches and always has taught that no sin is too great to be forgiven provided there be true repentance? The pope who pitilessly drives away the penitent sinner—and Tannhäuser surely was such ⁹⁶—is a creation inspired by a sentiment of hostility that did not exist in medieval Italy, where, whatever may have been the feeling towards individual popes, the papacy as an institution was not an object of aversion. A typical legend of the penitent sinner in Romance literature is that of Robert the Devil and a comparison with the Tannhäuserlegend in regard to the pope's attitude is highly instructive. Robert is the devil's own child, tho born of a human mother, and he is guilty of every atrocious crime against God and his fellowmen. Yet, when he confesses himself to the pope, he is received with every kindness. The Holy Father, at a loss for the proper penance to impose, directs him to a holy hermit, who receives a message from heaven with instructions on this point.⁹⁷ The penance Robert has to undergo is dreadfully

⁹⁵ Compare the words of Gaston Paris, *Légendes*, p. 135: "Seulement la dureté du pape a été atténuée....avec une visible gaucherie"... and of the cavalier's return he says: "C'est avec cette atténuation maladroite que la légende italienne passa en Allemagne...."

⁹⁶ What Paris says (*Légendes* p. 138) about Tannhäuser's being damned in the end in spite of the miracle, because he was guilty of the one unpardonable sin, despair of God's mercy, obviously has no bearing on this statement. When T. confessed to the pope he was truly penitent. His despair is the result of the pope's harsh refusal.

⁹⁷ *Robert le Diable* ed. Löseth, *Société des Anciens Textes Français* (Paris 1903) ll. 671-4:

Et il par Dieu et par sa grasse,

severe, but he cheerfully submits and in the end is forgiven. Here we behold the pope as the true representative of God, the dispenser of His mercy and His justice, and wholly different from the heartless, cruel priest of the German folksong. In the face of crime transcending human bounds he asks for a sign from heaven, not to find out whether to absolve the sinner, but to ascertain the nature of the penance to be imposed. The Swiss rustic of Hemmerlin's version also receives absolution, if not from the pope himself, at least from a specially designated confessor. Not one of the Italian versions, not even that of the *Salade*, knows of a pope whose action is at variance with one of the fundamental teachings of the very church of which he is the head. This action loses nothing of its odiousness by calling attention to the sinner's awful crime. It is true that the sin in this case was not merely that of impurity, but the far greater one of apostasy. To be sure, the guilt incurred was enormous, but that does not extenuate the pope's attitude. Tannhäuser's guilt was no greater than that of other famous sinners of medieval legend; the church that could save Robert the Devil could also save him. To assert that he could only be saved by a miracle⁹⁸ is to limit the power of the church in a way altogether opposed to Catholic conception, medieval as well as modern. Miracles are common enough in Christian legends dealing with the problem of sin and its forgiveness thru God's mercy, but they are not introduced to confute and discredit the church and its supreme representative, but to confirm, or at least to guide its judgement. Furthermore the power to absolve is not given to the priesthood to be exercised in arbitrary fashion; no priest, not the pope himself, can withhold absolution from the truly penitent sinner who confesses his sins. From whatever point of view we may regard the attitude ascribed to the pope in

Savra mout tost a brief espasse,
De tes pechiés la penitanche,
Or ne soies plus en doutanche.

⁹⁸ As is done by Pfaff *op. cit.* p. 106, where the pope's harshness is explained by referring to the old idea, already found in the Bible, "dass der Anblick des Heiligen dem Menschen verderblich sei"; hence intercourse with superhuman powers was considered ruinous.

the German version of the legend, it remains absolutely irreconcilable with the doctrines of the Catholic church.

It is certain then that the figure of the unforgiving pope owes its existence to sentiment bitterly hostile to the papacy, and such sentiment is to be looked for on German, rather than on Italian soil. In fact, here again, a significant parallel can be adduced from the Netherlands, the story of Jan van Beverly, the English knight, who, like Tannhäuser was refused absolution, but whose forgiveness is proclaimed by a miracle. Thru the mouth of an innocent babe God in this case makes his will known to the astonished people.⁹⁹

In Germany then we conclude, the story of the harsh pope originated. There the anti-papal sentiment was strong and widespread ever since the days of the Hohenstaufens. And Tannhäuser, be it remembered, was a staunch adherent of their cause, while Urban IV was strongly opposed to them. So, if the historical and legendary Tannhäuser are really identical,—and we can see no reason for disputing this—then the current assumption that the legend took shape shortly after the poet's death about 1270 or so has every probability in its favor.¹⁰⁰

The anti-papal sentiment of the folksong finds its most pointed expression in the miracle of the withered staff bursting into blossom, of which the Italian versions know nothing, and which is generally regarded as a late German addition. Paris, however,—and Nyrop agrees,—disputed this on the ground that the motif is a commonplace and devoid of national character. True, but the way in which it is used in the *Volkslied* is not at all commonplace. There it is introduced with the specific purpose of administering a pointed reproof to the cruel pope. No doubt, this feature is of Ger-

⁹⁹ The romance was first published at Antwerp in 1543, but is much older. See de Winkel, *Niederl. Lit.* in Paul's *Grundriss* 2, p. 492.

¹⁰⁰ Nyrop's argument against this view on the ground that the legend must have existed for almost 200 years before it made its appearance in literature loses its force in view of the evidence presented above (p. 46) showing that a Tannhäuser legend existed in Germany as early as the 14th century. Nyrop *op. cit.* p. 75.

man origin.¹⁰¹ But that it is a late addition is not at all certain. The *argumentum ex silentio* drawn from de la Sale's account and the Bauttner-song is not valid because the versions given there are not old. There is no reason for believing this mastersong to be the oldest known Tannhäuser-poem, except that it does not mention the staff-miracle. This omission was, however, probably intentional. As for de la Sale or his taleman, if he toned down the harsh attitude of the pope as related in the original story, he was bound also to suppress the staff-miracle, which may therefore very well have been known to him.¹⁰² In fact I do not see how this feature, which gives to the German legend its distinctive character and aesthetic value, can be separated from the rôle of the harsh pope. Is it conceivable that a legend ending with the damnation of the penitent sinner would ever have found favor with a medieval audience? Hardened and presumptuous sinners, who like Faust deliberately league with the devil and die impenitent, may be sent to everlasting hellfire as a solemn warning and horrible example. But the Faust-legend is not a characteristic medieval legend; it is the creation of a Protestant age and is permeated with the spirit of a stern Protestant orthodoxy which denies to the ancient church the means of saving sinners. In typical medieval legends the truly penitent sinner is never lost. Theophilus of Adana, who sells his soul to the devil, St. Gregory, guilty of incest and parricide, and Robert, conceived in sin and stained with crime, are all saved thru true repentance. Is Tannhäuser to be the only exception? I do not believe it. The pope refuses to save him, but God overrules His unworthy representative and proclaims His will by a miracle. The feature of the staff bursting into blossom is surely as old as the figure of the harsh pope; both belong to the Tannhäuserlegend from its beginning. And this leads us again to inquire how did the legend begin? Did it start with the historical minnesinger, or was he fitted into an older legend already developed at his time?

¹⁰¹ For German legends in which the motif is used in order to proclaim the innocence of persons unjustly condemned see Böckel, *Die deutsche Volkssage* (Leipzig 1909) pp. 109, 110.

¹⁰² This is also the argument of Gaston Paris *Légendes*, p. 136.

GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEGEND

The question of the genesis and the development of the legend is closely connected with that of Tannhäuser's identity. If we regard the legendary hero and the historical minnesinger as one and the same person, then we shall look for the origin of the legend in some event connected with the poet's life. But of this life practically nothing is known. From the extant poems it appears that he was a gay and dissolute fellow, fond of good living when fortune was on his side and always in quest of gallant adventure. After a life spent in dissipation remorse seems to have seized upon him; of his end nothing is known. In the struggle between empire and papacy he sided with the former. This is really all that we know about him. That his poetry lacks spirituality and is frankly sensual must be admitted, but there is no allusion to any experience suggesting the adventure of the *Venusberg*. In fact, there is not a single tangible fact in the poet's life to take hold of in an attempt to construct the *Urform* of the legend, which even in its barest outline can only be conjectured. According to Golther¹⁰³ this outline was something like this: Tannhäuser, after a dissipated life having fallen into dire distress, repents and makes a pilgrimage to Rome to seek absolution from pope Urban IV. This is refused to him, whereupon he leaves in despair and perishes miserably. Of the *Venusberg* and the staff-miracle this *Urform* knew nothing. These features were introduced into the legend later on.

The *Urform* postulated by Elster differs only in that it connects the *Venusberg* with the story from the very beginning.¹⁰⁴

After what has been said above in connection with the attitude of the pope in the legend and the staff-miracle, I need not say that the assumption of any such *Urform* is entirely incredible. It would be nothing more than a dull and pointless story of perdition, more apt to repel than to attract. Further-

¹⁰³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 21, 22.

¹⁰⁴ Elster *op. cit.*, p. 6. Of this version we read: "Ihr asketisch-pfäffischer Charakter liegt klar zu Tage". The very opposite is true. A version containing the figure of the harsh pope may be ascetic, but "pfäffisch" never!

more such a story would satisfy neither party. That a loyal adherent of the papacy would invent a legend discrediting the pope is a preposterous supposition. The Tannhäuserlegend in the form that we meet with in the Volkslied is certainly not an ecclesiastical product. It bears the stamp of a purely literary origin and arose probably in the circles of the mastersingers of the 13. or 14. century.¹⁰⁵ The anonymous author was a man of strong anti-papal sentiment which induced him to assign to the pope an odious rôle. Most likely he also brought in the motif of the staff-miracle. For, while he was no doubt eager to have a fling at the pope, it seems hardly likely that he should wish to gratify his animosity at the expense of Tannhäuser, who was not only a fellow-poet but also a fellow-partisan. By means of the staff-miracle he could save his hero and at the same time read a lesson to pope and clergy. Of course this is only a supposition, but it has at least plausibility.

At any rate it is safe to assume that the Tannhäuserlegend did not come to assume the form known from the folksong by the development of a single motive; it is the result of the fusion of several motives, which can still be clearly distinguished. The *Venusberg*, the penitent sinner and the staff-miracle were each originally the theme of an independent legend. Which one of these motives served as a starting-point for the story cannot possibly be determined with certainty from the material at hand.

If the legend really started with the historical minnesinger, then in all probability it was originally a legend of the penitent-sinner-type akin to that of Robert the Devil. Tannhäuser, whose contrite sentiment finds expression in the *Busslied*, was eminently fitted to become the hero of such a tale illustrative of God's boundless mercy. Possibly the staff-miracle was the outward sign by which this mercy was made known and originally served but to confirm the verdict of the church, in which case this feature of the story is very old. Possibly, however, it was introduced at a later stage when the figure of the cruel pope had been invented and a miracle was

¹⁰⁵ So Golther *op. cit.*, p. 22.

needed to save the repentant sinner. In that case an edifying, ecclesiastical legend was deliberately altered by an opponent of the papacy and made the vehicle of anti-papal sentiment. It was now made an occasion to draw that pointed contrast between the mercy of God and the inflexibility of the church, which gives the version of the German folksong its distinctive character.

There is still another way of explaining the origin of the legend by taking as a starting-point, not the person of Tannhäuser, but the famous theme of a mortal's sojourn in fairie, of which the myth of the *Venusberg* is a variant. In numerous stories of this type the hero, tho allowed to return to earth for a time, must in the end return to the fay's realm; so in the French lay of Lanval and the Scotch ballad of Thomas the Rhymour. When a story of this type was Christianized, it inevitably became the story of a man's league with the powers of hell and the consequent loss of his soul, unless he repented, in which case the legend became one of the penitent-sinner-type, and the motif of the ultimate return to fairie had to be abandoned. If this motive was retained, then that of repentance was inadmissible as conflicting with the doctrine of the church and as repugnant to the medieval spirit. We would then simply have a story of a hardened sinner who gets his deserts, but such a story would be anything but characteristic of medieval thought. It would much better fit into the 16. and 17. centuries with their stern Protestant orthodoxy. It is not conceivable that the original Tannhäuserlegend was of this type. But legends like those of Lanval, in which the hero must in the end return to fairyland, do not assume a Christian character in medieval literature. If Christian elements are present, as in the case of the English romance of Thomas of Erceldoune, they are without any incisive influence on the story.

It seems clear then that we can distinguish at least three different stories that go to make up the Tannhäuserlegend. In the first place there is a purely Christian legend of mercy showing the redemption of a penitent sinner. Then there is a purely pagan story of a mortal's sojourn in fairie. Lastly, there is the story of the harsh pope inspired by anti-papal

sentiment which changed the legend of mercy into one of perdition. Whether the staff-miracle originally belonged to the first of these three, or whether it came in with the third, can not be definitely decided.

When these three elements were combined there was bound to be discord, for the first and third were irreconcilable. This is precisely what happened. The legend as related in the folk-song has a strangely inconsistent character. Tannhäuser reenters the *Venusberg* and is therefore lost; as far as he is concerned the staff-miracle is useless. It has been suggested that this was to imply that after all he was to be saved at the day of doom. But this would involve another great difficulty on theological grounds. For, if Tannhäuser before was a penitent sinner deserving of mercy, he has now forfeited all claim to redemption; he has not only committed the one unpardonable sin of despairing of God's mercy, but he has also flung himself again into the arms of hell. The only really consistent feature about the legend is its anti-papal bias. The pope has been pointedly rebuked, his judgment discredited and his soul is lost.

A careful study of the different versions of the *Volkslied* confirms the conclusion that conflicting stories were fused without being perfectly harmonized. We meet not only with inconsistencies but even with positive contradictions showing that the poet could not control the heterogeneous material under his hands. Thus the High German vulgate ¹⁰⁶ relates the pope's harsh refusal, but in the very next verse makes Tannhäuser say (verse 21) :

Und sölt ich leben nun ain jar,
ain jar auf diser erden,
so wölt ich beicht und buoss empfahn
und gottes trost erwerben.

If the pope's refusal is final, how can the sinner receive "beicht und buoss" after another year or any number of years for that matter? For these words clearly imply that forgiveness is expected only thru the agency of the church,

¹⁰⁶ The different versions of the *Volkslied* are readily accessible in Erk und Böhme, *Deutscher Liederhort* (Leipzig 1893) vol. 1, pp. 40-51. Some of them are also reprinted in the works of Grässe and Golther.

not directly from God himself. Again in the Low German version Tannhäuser does not despair, but in spite of the cruel sentence appeals to Christ (verse 22) :

Danhuesser scheyde sick uth der Stadt
mit leyde unn ock mit ruwe,
O Jesu Christ van hemmelrick,
help my nu doerch all dyne truwe.

So also in the Swiss variant from the Entlibuch (verse 10), yet the next two verses represent him as despairing. When he meets the Virgin Mary he even exclaims :

“behüet dich gott, du reini magt!
dich darf ich nimmten anschauen”.

Why the Virgin is introduced here, when the sinner is not to be saved, is not readily comprehensible; if, however, the legend was originally the story of a sinner's redemption, her presence requires no explanation. Here again we meet with a survival from the older form of the legend. In verse 14 of the same version the pope's messengers seeking Tannhäuser are informed :

Danhuser ist iez nimmten hie,
Danhuser ist verfaren,
Danhuser ist in Frau Frenen berg,
wolt Gottes gnad erwarten.

The last line makes it perfectly plain that the sinner does not despair but still puts his trust in God. And the Low German version bears this out. There in answer to the inquiry of Venus about his journey to Rome the knight exclaims (verse 26) :

Als ydt my gegangen hefft,
dat hedd ick wol vorswaren.
Noch bydd ick Christum van Hemmelrick,
he leth my nicht bliuen vorlaren.

Surely the motif of mercy will not down. Even in the High German poem it persists. That Tannhäuser was ultimately to be saved is clearly implied in the lines of verse 23 :

Ich will zu meiner frawen zart,
wa mich gott will hin senden.

It is explicitly stated in the version given by Kornemann (verse 26) :

Da wardt er wider in den Berg,
Darinnen solt er nun bleiben,
So lang biss an den Jüngsten Tag,
Wo ihn Gott wil hinweisen.

Moreover, in the vulgate Tannhäuser's reply to the welcome of Venus (verse 24) is not given. This is plainly an omission as comparison with the Low German and Dutch variants proves. The older High German version undoubtedly also made the knight put his trust in God, or, in the still more primitive form, in the Virgin Mary.

In the representation of the attitude of the pope there is also notable inconsistency. In most versions this attitude is simply one of unmitigated odiousness indicative of strong anti-clerical feeling, which finds expression in the closing lines of the Vulgate, and still more pointedly in the final strophes of the Kornemann and Entlibuch versions. But the fiercest outbursts of this feeling are found in the Low German and Dutch versions. In the latter the pope is harsh to the point of brutality (verse 11) :

Hebby seven jaer in den berch ghewest
met vrou Venus die duivelinne,
so sult ghy bernen ewelick
al in die helsche pine.

Tannhäuser, or rather Danielken, stung to despair, curses the cruel priests (verse 13) :

Vermeledijt moeten die pausen sijn
Die ons ter hellen driven!
Sie hebben gode so menighe siele ghenomen
die wel behouden mochten bliven.

This agrees with the Low Germans (verse 23) almost word for word. And yet the closing verses of this latter version show a sympathy for the pope wholly at variance with these violent anti-clerical outbursts.

De Pawes bedrouede sick gantz ser
he hefft gebeden alle stunde,
Godt wyl erfuellen Danhuesers beger
und vergeven em sune suende.

Not a word here of the pope's being damned for his harshness.

And lastly there is a significant variation in the way the different versions tell of the pope's refusal to absolve. The Vulgate (verse 20) in agreement with most versions makes the pontiff say:

als wenig das steblin gronen mag
kumstu zu gottes hulde.

But the Low German—and here the Dutch and Kornemann variants agree—is far less positive. There the pope simply plants a dry staff in the ground and says (verse 21):

So de staff nu groenen wert,
scholen dyne Buende vorgeuen werden.

Is this a reminiscence of the fact that in the primitive form of the legend the pope did not absolutely and finally refuse the absolution, but, as in the story of Robert the Devil, appealed to heaven for a sign? In that case the *Urform* knew the staff-miracle, but not the figure of the cruel, unforgiving pope.

And so the Tannhäuserlegend was originally a legend of mercy, an ecclesiastical recast of an old Celtic pagan tale relating the sojourn of a mortal in fairy-land. It was a story designed to illustrate the boundless mercy of God and the saving power of the church. In the Christian mind fairie was associated with hell; the knight who entered the enchanted realm was guilty of apostasy in its gravest form; his return to earth was represented as an act inspired by sincere repentance and God's mercy showed itself in the form of a miracle. The pope may very well have figured in this oldest form of the legend, but not as the cruel, unforgiving priest.

Thus far there would be nothing distinctly national about the legend. With the introduction of the minnesinger the national element comes in. The legend now assumes German color. Tannhäuser, who was already in the 14. century regarded as a typical penitent, fitted well into a legend of the character here outlined. For the reasons developed in another part of this essay fairie in Germany was bound to assume the shape of a hollow mountain-paradise ruled by Venus. In

Germany also the legend under the hands of a poet who belonged to the anti-papal party was readily changed and made to set forth in glaring contrast the infinite mercy of God and the inflexibility of the church. This was effected by assigning to the pope an odious rôle, impossible from the point of view of Catholic doctrine, and the contrast was still further emphasized by the way the motif of the staff-miracle is utilized. Thus the Tannhäuserlegend received its characteristic form. The story of redemption was changed into one of perdition, but the change was not effected without causing serious inconsistencies and contradictions.

In the course of its development the legend absorbed elements originally extraneous to it. Thus the figure of the trusty Eckhard belongs to Germanic heroic saga which knows him as the typical faithful guardian who warns against impending treachery. His rôle is without influence on the character of the legend and requires no discussion here. But the case is different with the motif of the weekly transformation of the ladies of the Sibyl's paradise into serpents and scorpions. This trait is found not only in the Italian versions as attested by the Guerino romance and the accounts of de la Sale and Alberti, but also in the Swiss variants from Aargau and St. Gallen. This coincidence is regarded by the exponents of the Italian theory as a proof of their claim. The Swiss variants have preserved an ancient feature better than the German versions because Switzerland is nearer to Italy, the original home of the legend.¹⁰⁷ But even if it were certain that this feature of the legend is really old, it need not have come from Italy. The motif is wide-spread; a parallel is the loathly-lady incident in the English poem of Thomas of Erceldoune. More famous is the analogous transformation narrated in the romances concerning the fay Melusine. In Switzerland these romances seem to have enjoyed a special vogue; the author of the best-known German version, Tübing von Ringoltingen (1456), was a native of Bern. In this connection a legend is of interest which is recorded from the neighborhood of Basel

¹⁰⁷ So Gaston Paris, *Légendes*, p. 133; Dübi *op. cit.*, p. 264; Nyrop, *op. cit.*, p. 72; Golther *op. cit.*, p. 36 also admits the greater antiquity of the Swiss version.

for the year 1520.¹⁰⁸ A half-witted simpleton penetrates into a subterranean paradise ruled by a maiden, half human half serpent, who can only be released if some man will be brave enough to kiss her three times. The youth's courage fails him at the third attempt and he flees. Of course, we recognize at once the well known motif of the *fier baiser*. It would seem that the transformation-feature of the Swiss variants was originally an independent legend which was subsequently in Switzerland connected with the myth of the *Venusberg*. Its presence in the poem may be due to the influence of local tradition.¹⁰⁹ At any rate it is not necessary to assume Italian provenience in this case, tho Italian influence on the Swiss versions is quite possible. But the reverse is just as likely. Swiss mercenaries, who were numerous in Italy from the 14. century on, may have carried German legends into that land, and the story of the ladies changed into serpents may have been transmitted thru them. In fact the transmission of the entire Tannhäuserlegend and its localization on the Monte della Sibilla may be due to their influence.

In conclusion we may sum up as follows. The Tannhäuserlegend, as we know it, is the result of the fusion of two great legendary motives originally distinct from each other. An old pagan myth of a mortal's sojourn in fairie was blended with a Christian legend of mercy and thus arose an ecclesiastical legend glorifying the power of the church by showing how thru penance even the greatest sinner could be saved. Under the influence of anti-clerical sentiment the legend was altered to a story of perdition, but its consistent character was thereby destroyed. Neither the pagan nor the Christian themes at the basis of the legend are of German origin; the former is ultimately Celtic, the latter international like the medieval church. But the development of the legend is not international; that is unmistakably German. All the traits

¹⁰⁸ Grimm, *Deutsche Sagen* ed. Steig (Berlin 1905) No. 13, pp. 9, 10.

¹⁰⁹ The closing lines of the Aargau version confuse Tannhäuser with the sleeping emperor of the Kyffhäuser-legend and shows how readily traits wholly extraneous to the story could be introduced. See Tobler, *op. cit.*, 5, p. 163, note.

that give to the story its distinctive character, the name of the paradise, the name of the hero, the anti-papal sentiment emphasized by the staff-miracle, are of German origin. We are therefore perfectly justified in regarding the legend of Tannhäuser as a German legend.

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